Archibald Marshall, "Richard Baldock" and Professor Phelps

By EDWARD N. TEALL.

PROF. PHELPS says in his admirably definitive short study of Archibald Marshall as "a contemporary realistic novelist": "It was in the year 1906, and in the novel *Richard Baldock*, that Archibald Marshall revealed his power." After twelve years, and following some Marshall novels of earlier date, *Richard Baldock* has reached America. Its arrival ought to be an "event," but there has not been and we cannot imagine that there will be any very great excitement over its appearance; though many readers of good taste and discriminating judgment will greet it with quiet joy. We shall hear something about the "modern Trollope." That is just plain bull. There are comparisons that spring spontaneously to the mind and that rest there fruitfully, but this is not one of that kind.

In the first place, there are not enough modern Americans that know anything about Trollope (except the name and the reputation) to make it mean anything to compare a writer of to-day with that writer of day before yesterday; and in the second place, even if the comparison could be made without the need of a critique of Trollope to help it to "get over," it would not be worth the necessary expenditure of time and words, because Mr. Archibald Marshall is so very well able to stand upon his own two feet. We like him. Not only can we read his books without effort, but the reading of them leaves stories and persons in our minds with the same easy firmness of establishment there that the novels of Dickens bless us with.

A Tale of Father and Son.

In this story Mr. Marshall seems to remind us, not quite so much of the Marshall we remember from the reading, some time ago, of one or two of his novels of English country life, like *The Old Order Changeth*, as of Mr. Walpole in *The Duchess of Wrexe*. English country life is in this tale, but the study is not of it, but of the life building of a young man. Mr. Phelps, if we take his meaning aright, finds the core of the story in the battle of wills—and won'ts—between a father and his son. To us the purposive pith of it seems to be in the young fellow's own character history—in the struggle that goes on in his own mind between two pulls: one toward a mercantile life with the happiness of work, and the other toward an aristocratic alliance to be bought and paid for with the sacrifice of his own honest preferences.

The story itself is simple, as to incident; not exciting, in the manner of its presentation—but strong with dramatic conflict. Richard is left motherless. His father, a harsh clergyman, "brings him up," as we say of those who do their stupid best to drive a young soul out of the course meant for it in the world. In fact, in one very easily justified view of it, the story is a trenchant forthsetting of the evils that grow out of the endeavors of earnestly dutiful but wofully misguided parents to live their children's lives for them.

Yes, a Rich Aunt.

Richard has a wealthy aunt; his dead mother's sister. She has him visit her splendiferous home for a while, so that she can look him over at her leisure, with a view to determining his possibilities as material for society—high society. The youngster fails to make good; had he been more of a prig, he had done better there. A sly young sprig of near nobility does him out of his prospects, and when the supplanter's father marries the rich widow, Richard's future becomes uncertain.

Now comes the open battle with his father. John Baldock can see no place in life for his son but in the ministry. Richard will none of it, and Baldock Pater washes his hands of the ungrateful young runagate. Somehow or other, we cannot think of the elder Baldock without falling into the language of melodrama or burlesque. It is more than the eminently respectable gentleman really deserves; still he invites it and will have to stand for it.

And here Richard confronts the real problem of his life. He can go into the publishing business, with most unusual opportunities for advancement and the winning of an independent and influential position; or he can accept the kindness of his friend, the Squire, and go to Oxford to be a gentleman, and ultimately the writer of books for other publishers to "undertake." By very delicate analysis Mr. Marshall makes us quite sure that as a writer the young man could never have been a success, and we are not a bit sorry that he makes us certain also that Richard Baldock would never have been brilliant in Society. He turns out to be a good deal of a man. He wins out in love, as well as in business.

This is the barest skeleton of the story. In the book it has form and the breath of life. Mr. Marshall is master of a most refined art. He is not a stylist; he writes with admirable simplicity. Single words do not flash out of the type, there are no startling phrases; but the writing is so clear, so clean and so strong that after the book is read it leaves a pleasant consciousness of having been in contact with a really splendid mastery of expression. This is a point well worth noting in a time when natural English is not much met with in our fiction.

Persistent Personalities.

The remarkable thing about the Archibald Marshall books is that through the process of reading they hold the attention firmly, but the impression they score does not take clear form till the reading is finished. They "stay by you," in the good old phrase of the vulgar tongue. So it is with the character drawing.

In this book, for example, you do not realize, as you march through the pages, that you are getting acquainted with so many people who are really worth knowing and whom you shall not easily forget. Even Mrs. Baldock, who speaks only in the first chapter and dies in the second, has defined personality, and holds a place in the final impression left by the book. Aunt Henrietta is not a bit figureheadish. Sarah, the old woman who takes care of the motherless boy, is a regular female Jonathan Edwards, preaching hellfire to the youngster—a reduction to absurdity of the cold religiosity that gives this bare household its dominant character. Mrs. Meaking is the very embodiment of the idea of the shabby genteel. And Job, the old gardener, is an almost immortal creation. Squire Ventrey is pure archibaldmarshall—cultured, keen and kind, yet rather imperious in his self-controlled way. The contrast between the clergyman's austerity and the Squire's luminous philosophy is delightful. And Bliss, the butler who would a conjuror be but becomes a ventriloquist of rare attainment, is a wholly human and most entertaining creature of the novelist's imagination. A rare gallery!

A Memorable Figure.

John Baldock, father of our Richard, is the one of all the characters, however, that grips you. An utterly unlovable man, yet one who arouses in you a sympathy that would make him hate you. Just at first he chilled us with apprehension lest he prove to be a lay figure, a type, devised for the making of a point against a form of religiousness that the author meant to excoriate. He seemed a bit overdone in his asceticism; his pious platitudes seemed like to degenerate at any moment in the story into mere burlesque.

But as the telling of the tale proceeds the character becomes more and more sharply real, until at last it gets to be almost terrible. The sincerity of the man in his misguided way of looking at things is so complete! What seems, at first, like out and out villainous treatment of a growing boy appears finally so clearly to be based on resentment of resistance against, not his will, but the Divine will, that it is difficult to condemn him severely. His confusion of his own will with the Divine one is genuine—which, of course, does not make it any the less an error, or any the less mischievous. His nature is narrow and petulant; that of his son, who "takes after" his admirable mother, is generous, with a good deal of strength.

It is a bitter fate that the stern clergyman carves out for himself; and he is so much the victim of his nature and his training that every generous impulse in us bids us rejoice when at last—not as the result of one easily written reconciliation scene, but in the natural course of events—he gets around to recognizing Richard's right to live his own life, and is able to live it with him more happily than our early meetings with him gave us any reason to hope for. Nice things can happen in life, even out of unhopeful premises, but some novelists are afraid to let them shine out of the pages of their books. Mr. Marshall does not wrench the logic of the facts of human nature.

Mr. Marshall is strong on "conversation." It is not quite right in a novel, even a novel of realistic intent, to let people talk exactly as they do in real life. And it is all wrong if the author uses them as mere mouthpieces for the utterance of his own ideas, instruments for propaganda. This novelist gets just the right result by refusing to let his persons say everything they might be supposed to want to say; he selects the things that they ought to be allowed to say to us, so that we may know just what is going on—and that is art.

Richard Baldock suggests to us a car painted in quiet colors, catching the trained and appreciative eye by the sheer beauty of its "line"; driven by an engine without a bit of noise and smoke, but full of power. It rides easy. It has speed, without violence. It gets you there without jolting—and it isn't until, at journey's end, you look at the road map, that you realize how far you have come and how fast you must have travelled.

RICHARD BALDOCK. By Archibald Marshall. Dodd, Mead & Co. $1.50.

ARCHIBALD MARSHALL: A CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC NOVELIST. By William Lyon Phelps. Dodd, Mead & Co. 50 cents.

Four New Books of Verse

By CONSTANCE MURRAY GREENE

IN a group of four books of verse we have *The Sad Years*, Dora Sigerson's poems written in war time; *Memory: Poems of War and Love*, by A. Newberry Choyce, Lieutenant in the Leicestershire Regiment; *Outcasts in Beulah Land*, verse in the language of the street, by Roy Helton, and Arthur Guiterman's latest collection, *The Mirthful Lyre*, thus running the gamut from tragedy to humor.

Dora Sigerson (Mrs. Clement Shorter) is said to have died of sorrow over the events of Easter, 1916, her heart crushed and broken by the tragedy which passionate love of Ireland made too great to bear. She belonged to that famous group of which Louise Guiney and Francis Thompson were comembers, and was so beloved as a high and beautiful character that one scarcely dares the laying of sacrilegious hands upon her work.

As a poet she was widely recognized before her death. There is in all that she does deep feeling, exquisite rhythm and expression, and that peculiarly Irish quality of far seeing mysticism, combined with the gift of interpreting little homely things. In no poem is her sorrow for the ways of the world more potent than in that inspired by the old proverb, "It will be all the same in a thousand years," which ends:

"This in a thousand years
Payment of blood and tears,
Horrors we dare not name,
It will be all the same.
What is the value then
To all those sleeping men?
It will be all the same,
Passion and grief and blame.
This in the years to be,
My God, the tragedy!"

Lieut. Choyce's "slender volume," as the reviewers like to say, takes its name from the first poem, which is also its best. His work bears the scars of suffering and of remembered tragedy.

"And scarcely can God's wide eternity
Have length to bring forgetfulness to me,"

he meditates in *Convalescence*, and in *Per Ardua:*

"Sing a little song for me,
One short refrain.
And let it be a melody
Of pain."

After such poetry as that of Dora Sigerson and Lieut. Choyce, Roy Helton's comes with a sense of crudity and ugliness, which must be met with a half smile to be found even tolerable. When one has accustomed the mind to the external unpleasantness there will be found much that is sincere and of a certain promise. The author is a Southern mountaineer, who has come North for his impressions, and our instinctive feeling is that the Southern mountains would have been finer inspiration than the dives and horrors of which he writes:

"Uncomfortably stumbling on the dead,"

to use his own words, more often than need be. If he can do this with ordinary dens and lobster palaces what *would* he do with a trench?

As giving a touch of local color we quote a verse from *Ten Minutes at Tea Time:*

"So I answers him, 'Richmond Rosie,
For all I knows or cares,
Kin eat her fancy victuals
On Mrs. Hell's back stairs.'
The pale lad's eye went glassy,
He kind o' thinned at the lip,
And I saw his long white fingers
Amble around to his hip."

Fingers amble around to the hip so often through these pages and knives are drawn so lightly and easily that the general trend is distinctly murderous, but hardly worthy of deep concern.

A new collection of the verse of Arthur Guiterman is always a pleasure. *The Laughing Muse*, his last success, so amply fulfilled its purpose that he has followed it rather closely with *The Mirthful Lyre*. As is so often the case with this sort of poetry, the book contains too many selections, but there is enough really good material to carry the rest along. Oliver Herford, Carolyn Wells, Arthur Guiterman and a younger poet, Anthony Euwer, whose work is coming into general recognition, form our best group of humorous poets, but Guiterman must also be counted among the serious poets, a fact which is apt to be overlooked in our enthusiasm over his lighter efforts. You must not fail to notice *The Idol Maker Prays*, that sonnet which is almost lost among such things as the irresistible,

"The world is too much with us, much
too much,"

and his l'envoi *To Hills*, which closes:

"So let me hold my way,
By nothing halted,
Until, at close of day,
I stand, exalted.

"High on my Hills of dream—
Dear hills that know me!
And then, how fair will seem
The lands below me.

"How pure, at vesper time,
The far bells chiming!
God give me hills to climb
And strength for climbing!"

THE SAD YEARS. By Dora Sigerson. George H. Doran Company. $1.25.

MEMORY; POEMS OF LOVE AND WAR. By A. Newberry Choyce. John Lane Company. $1.

OUTCASTS IN BEULAH LAND. By Roy Helton. Henry Holt and Company. $1.30.

THE MIRTHFUL LYRE. By Arthur Guiterman. Harper and Brothers. $1.25.